



NORTH AMERICAN **Nietzsche** SOCIETY

# HOMER'S CONTEST

b y

**Friedrich Nietzsche**

in a new translation  
with notes and commentary

and with an introductory essay

"Re/Introducing 'Homer's Contest'"

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**Christa Davis Acampora**

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## Preface

Nietzsche's early essay "Homer's Contest" is no less important than his much better-known "Truth and Lie in a Nonmoral Sense." He neither finished nor published either of them. Both date from the period immediately following his publication of The Birth of Tragedy; and both offer valuable insights into the different directions in which his thinking was moving in this crucial period in his intellectual and philosophical development.

It is unfortunate that these two meditations are not more often read together; for "Homer's Contest" complements the "Truth and Lie" essay in several crucial respects. In both Nietzsche clearly was moving away from his earlier preoccupation with Wagner--and also with art. In the latter he made a first attempt to sketch out the stark view with which he was experimenting of the human condition and of the merely conventional and artificial, pragmatically driven character of language within which human thinking is largely confined.

But this was only one of Nietzsche's emerging concerns. Another, conjoined to it, was his deep interest in culture, his conception of which was broadening, and to which he continued to look for whatever solution there might be to the fundamental problem with which he had been grappling in The Birth of Tragedy. In "Homer's Contest" he took a much broader look at Greek culture, reflecting on the way it worked more generally, rather than focussing so narrowly on its art forms. The role of culture in the enhancement of human life--conceived in terms of the attainment of excellence, involving the sublimation of our all-too-natural impulses--now became his theme, as he considered the remarkable results in the lives of the Greeks of the kinds of institutions and practices they developed.

Until recently no complete English translation of "Homer's Contest" was available; and the English text remains difficult to come by. Christa Acampora Davis has done a considerable service by making a new and complete translation of it, supplying it with an introduction and notes and commentary. This should help to gain for it the attention it deserves, and to promote its understanding and appreciation. We are indebted to her both for her efforts and for her willingness to allow them to be made available in the North American Nietzsche Society's NIETZSCHEANA series.

Richard Schacht, Executive Director  
North American Nietzsche Society

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# Re/Introducing "Homer's Contest"

*a new translation with notes and commentary*

by Christa Davis Acampora

In 1872 Nietzsche wrote a set of five prefaces to books that were not yet written and which, he claimed, never would be.<sup>1</sup> The prefaces were sent together as a Christmas gift to Cosima Wagner.<sup>2</sup> The dedication reads: "Für Frau Cosima Wagner in herzlicher Verehrung und als Antwort auf mündliche und briefliche Fragen, vergnügten Sinnes niedergeschreiben in den Weihnachtstagen 1872." Among them was a piece entitled "Homer's Wettkampf." By December 1872, Nietzsche had been at Basel for more than three years and had visited Richard and Cosima Wagner at least twenty-three times in Triebischen.<sup>3</sup> The Wagners had left for Bayreuth in the spring of that year. Nietzsche refused both an earlier invitation to visit and then an invitation to spend the Christmas holidays and the celebration of Cosima's birthday in the Wagners' new home. He completed "Homer's Contest" on December 29, 1872, alone in Basel.

The Wagners were displeased with Nietzsche's refusals to visit and were unimpressed with his gift. Cosima noted in her diary that the manuscript was marred by occasional rough spots and lapses.<sup>4</sup> But on February 12, 1873, Cosima wrote Nietzsche a letter in which she suggested that the subjects of "Homer's Contest" and of another preface, entitled "The Greek State," were precisely where Nietzsche was most at home and where he had his most acute insights. She encouraged him to reconsider his intention to abandon this work and to consider pursuing a book that would elaborate these related ideas.<sup>5</sup> In fact, Nietzsche continued to work on the ideas in "Homer's Contest." Drafts and plans for *Untimely Meditations* include one to be titled "Der Wettkampf," and Nietzsche planned to include some of these themes in his work on the pre-Platonic philosophers.<sup>6</sup> He later incorporated revised portions in published writings.<sup>7</sup>

In "Homer's Contest," Nietzsche describes an ethical transformation, a revaluation of values, that he claims provided the conditions for the flourishing of Greek culture. He accounts for cultural institutions that made possible monumental accomplishments in art and literature. He

<sup>1</sup>Nietzsche began to develop these ideas as early as August, 1869. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1967ff), Part III, volume 3, passim. Works cited from this edition are hereafter abbreviated, KGW, followed by the part, volume, and page numbers.

<sup>2</sup>Nietzsche gave them the collective title, "Fünf Vorreden zu fünf ungeschriebenen Büchern." See KGW, III, 2, 245-246.

<sup>3</sup>See Nietzsche's reference to the frequency of his visits in his May 1, 1872, letter to Carl von Gersdorff in *Briefwechsel: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (KGBW), ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1978), II, 1, letter 214, p. 317).

<sup>4</sup>Cosima Wager, *Die Tagebücher*, ed. Martin Gregor-Dellin and Dietrich Mack (München: Piper, 1976) Vol. I, p. 623.

<sup>5</sup>KGBW II, 4, letter 412.

<sup>6</sup>For a few examples see KGW III, 4, (16, 122, 134-5, 143, 187, 309, 312).

<sup>7</sup>*Human All Too Human* contains many similar passages (all references are to part and/or section numbers): *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*, I, (158, 159, 477, 503); *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* II, 2 (29-31, 33, 99, 170, 226). Also see *Morgenröthe*, 38, 69; *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* III, 168; *Also sprach Zarathustra* I (5, 10, 14); *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* 23; *Der Antichrist* 16.)

describes the nature of education in early Greek society and how this practice yielded exemplary human beings. Finally, he suggests some reasons why this type of cultural prosperity has not been achieved in modern society.<sup>8</sup> Moderns, Nietzsche claims, see the whole world with an ethical "coloring" different from that of the ancients. One of the most significant differences is the interpretation of strife [*eris*] and envy [*Neid*].

Eris, sister of the war god Ares, was associated in antiquity with discord and strife. She figures prominently in the story of the judgment of Paris and was generally considered an evil goddess by the Greeks. In Works and Days, however, Hesiod describes two Eris-goddesses: one is responsible for the drive to wage wars of annihilation and destruction, the other provides gifts whose works are good. This second goddess inspires envy and jealousy, driving individuals to better one another. According to Hesiod's myth, Zeus put the good Eris on earth to encourage labor among men. She is praised because she encourages activities that aid humankind. To be spurred on by envy is not a punishment in the sense of painful yearning for what one lacks, rather, it is a god-given gift that leads to greater human achievement.<sup>9</sup>

It is the good form of *eris* that Nietzsche claims moderns have ignored and are unable to understand. Greek culture, with its festivals, physical contests, and wrestling matches, with its dramatic and artistic competitions, was organized around this ambitious drive. Following his Basel colleague, Jacob Burckhardt,<sup>10</sup> Nietzsche claims that the introduction of artistic and athletic contests, the Greek *agon*, harnessed the spiritual drive to rule for the achievement of unparalleled excellence. He claims that in the *agon* "good...Eris...as jealousy, resentment, and envy, provokes human beings to action — not to the action of fights of annihilation but rather to the action of contests."<sup>11</sup> The *eris* of envy allowed these unavoidable urges to find expression in perpetual competition.

In his discussion of the two Eris goddesses, Nietzsche is careful to distinguish two types of activities they incite. One goddess drives human beings to *Vernichtungslust*, a desire to bring about the complete destruction of what opposes. The second Eris incites individuals to better their opposition in fights of contest, *Wettkämpfe*. Nietzsche characterizes this as an activity among similarly skilled opponents, e.g., a struggle between rivals worthy of each other. In Human All Too Human, Nietzsche further distinguishes these two actions when he writes, "The envious one

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<sup>8</sup>These ideas are certainly compatible with Nietzsche's other work during the same period. See Philologische Schriften, KGW II,1, especially "Der Florentinische Tractat über Homer und Hesiod, ihr Geschlect und ihren Wettkampf"; Nachgelassene Schriften, KGW III, 2, especially "Die Philosophie im tragischen Zeitalter der Griechen"; Vorlesungsaufzeichnungen 1870-1871, KGW II, 3; Vorlesungsaufzeichnungen 1869-1870 KGW II, 2. Portions of Nietzsche's notes and short unpublished writings appear in English translation in Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the Early 1870's, edited and translated by Daniel Breazeale (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1990 (reprint, 1979)). Some of Nietzsche's lectures are translated in Friedrich Nietzsche on Rhetoric and Language, edited and translated by Sander L. Gilman, Carole Blair, and David J. Parent (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

<sup>9</sup>Hesiod, Works and Days, lines 1-26.

<sup>10</sup>See Jacob Burckhardt, History of Greek Culture, translated by Palmer Hiltz (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1963), passim. Nietzsche had copies of notes from these lectures prepared by two students. See his correspondence from May, 1875. William Arrowsmith has translated parts of Nietzsche's own notes on these lectures in "We Classicists," in Unmodern Observations, edited by William Arrowsmith (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1990). Also see H. I. Marrou, A History of Education in Antiquity, translated by George Lamb (New York: Sheed and Ward, Inc., 1956).

<sup>11</sup>KGW, III, 2, 281.

senses in another every way in which he towers over the common measure and the first wants to push the other down to it [*herabdrücken*] — or to raise himself up [*erheben*] to the height of the other: out of which there arise two different modes of action, which Hesiod designated as the evil and the good Eris.<sup>12</sup> These modes of action — pushing down and rising above — distinguish not only individuals, but also varieties of culture. Nietzsche argues that the achievements of Greek culture were made possible by the proliferation of outlets organized on the *agonistic* model. Contests, through which the striving impulse could express itself creatively, allowed and encouraged competitors to rise above one another. Creative action thrived in these institutions.

"Homer's Contest" is important to Nietzsche studies for several reasons. The preface marks an attempt to describe explicitly the relationship between cultural health and the interpretation of human existence. In this work, Nietzsche provides a specific example of values in transition. His enthusiasm for the Greeks and his own later project of reevaluating values cannot be fully appreciated without a clear understanding of what Nietzsche believed to be the distinctive institution of competition and how it evolved in Greek culture. Perhaps most importantly, "Homer's Contest" is Nietzsche's most extended discussion of envy, *Neid*, a topic that appears throughout his writings. Nietzsche refers to *Neid* (and words derived from it) more than 170 times in his published works and notebooks, but nowhere does he focus his attention on the topic more explicitly than in this early preface. In his concluding paragraph, Nietzsche writes, "without envy, jealousy, and contesting ambition, the Hellenic state, like the Hellenic human being, degenerates. It becomes evil and cruel; it becomes revengeful and godless; in short, it becomes 'pre-Homeric'."<sup>13</sup> We fail to understand Nietzsche when we do not recognize the distinction he draws between actions motivated by envy, jealousy, and contesting ambition and those that are evil, cruel, and motivated by revenge. Nietzsche scholars have not always ignored these differences, but the question of how these distinctions are relevant to human health and happiness must still be asked. "Homer's Contest" provides an important part of the answer.

While much of Nietzsche's later work focuses on degeneration, readers of "Homer's Contest" are given a *positive* account of what life for the healthy, self-overcoming philosopher of the future might be like. Although Nietzsche did not think that we should simply strive to recreate ancient Greek culture — partly because he did not think this was possible and partly because he did not believe the Greeks to be without serious faults — he was interested in investigating Greek culture to determine the conditions that made possible great accomplishment. The agonistic element is a condition Nietzsche sought to revive. Nietzsche advocated a "curriculum of competition" through which Greek culture would be surpassed in a creative wrestling with ancient accomplishments.<sup>14</sup>

This translation was made from *Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, edited by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, (Berlin: de Gruyter, Part III, volume 2, 1967ff). The text differs only slightly from that of *Nietzsches Werke, Grossoktavausgabe*, 2nd edition, Volume IX, (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1901-1913 and 1926). David R. Lachterman has recently argued that we must take seriously Nietzsche's philology if we are to understand his philosophy,<sup>15</sup> and William Arrowsmith

<sup>12</sup> "Der Neidische fühlt jedes Hervorragen des Anderen über das gemeinsame Maass und will ihn bis dahin herabdrücken — oder sich bis dorthin erheben: woraus sich zwei verschiedene Handlungsweisen ergeben, welche Hesiod als die böse und die gute Eris bezeichnet hat," KGW, IV, 3, 200.

<sup>13</sup> KGW, III, 2, 286.

<sup>14</sup> See "We Classicists," especially part 5, sections 53, 146, 166, 167, and 172.

<sup>15</sup> David R. Lachterman, "Die Ewige Wiederkehr der Griechen: Nietzsche And The Homeric Question," *International Studies in Philosophy* XXIII: 2 (1991) pp. 83-101.

claims that "[t]he saturation...of the early Nietzsche's mind in the poetry and thought of archaic Greece is crucial to the understanding of the late Nietzsche's tragic metaphysics."<sup>16</sup> The notes to this translation are meant to help readers gain a greater appreciation for the classical literature and history to which Nietzsche refers. His work, early and late, cannot be fully understood without this context.

In "Homer's Contest," Nietzsche clearly distinguishes creative forms of striving from those that destroy and annihilate. When Nietzsche is discussing war, he uses the German word *Krieg*, and when he is discussing military battles, he uses the word *Schlacht*. When he is referring to struggles that are not explicitly military, Nietzsche frequently uses the word *Kampf* or related words. I translate these words as 'fight,' 'struggle,' or 'conflict.' A fight to the death or the annihilation of what opposes is a *Vernichtungskampf*, and a struggle in which one strives to better the opponent is a *Wettkampf*. I consistently translate the German word '*Wettkampf*' as 'contest,' and I preserve this meaning in my translation of related words.

Other English translations of this work include Maximilian A. Mügge's "Homer's Contest" in the Oscar Levy edition of The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche (1909-1911) and Carol Diethe's "Homer on Competition" in On the Genealogy of Morality, edited by Keith Ansell-Pearson, 1994. The translation in Walter Kaufmann's The Portable Nietzsche omits numerous significant passages.<sup>17</sup> Kaufmann does Nietzsche a disservice when he notes that "Homer's Contest" is a fragment, for this suggests that it was merely one of the many rough and unfinished pieces Nietzsche left in his notebooks.<sup>18</sup> Nietzsche considered the ideas in this preface for years. He polished and considerably reworked the material before presenting it to Cosima Wagner and the many guests of Bayreuth who might later read it.

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<sup>16</sup>William Arrowsmith, introduction to "We Classicists," p. 319.

<sup>17</sup>These are noted in the translation below.

<sup>18</sup>See Kaufmann's brief discussion of "Homer's Contest" in his Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974 (Fourth Edition)) pp. 192-193.

Friedrich Nietzsche

## Homer's Contest<sup>1</sup>

[*Homers Wettkampf*]

### Preface

[277]<sup>2</sup> When one speaks of *humanity*, underlying this idea is the belief that it is humanity which separates and distinguishes human beings from nature. But, there is, in reality, no such distinction: the "natural" qualities and those properly called "human" grow inseparably. The human, in his highest and noblest capacities, is wholly nature and bears within himself its uncanny dual character. Those abilities that are thought to be terrifying and inhuman are perhaps even the fruitful soil from which alone all humanity can grow in emotions, deeds, and works.

Thus the Greeks, the most humane people of ancient times, possess a trait of cruelty, a tigerish lust to annihilate: a trait that is also quite visible in that grotesquely magnified reflection of the Hellenes, Alexander the Great, and which must terrify us if we approach it in their entire history as in their mythology with the flabby concept of modern humanity. [278] When Alexander has the feet of Batis, the brave defender of Gaza, pierced and ties his living body to his chariot to drag him about under the scorn of his soldiers,<sup>3</sup> that caricature of Achilles, who similarly mistreats the corpse of Hector at night,<sup>4</sup> excites the same disgust in us; but even that trait is offensive and fills us with horror.<sup>5</sup> Here we look into the chasms of hatred. With the same sentiment we may also stand before the bloody and insatiable mutual laceration of two Greek factions, for example, in the Corcyrean Revolution.<sup>6</sup> When the victor, in a fight between cities, according to the entitlements of war, executes the entire male citizenry and sells all the women and children into slavery, we see in the sanction of such laws that the Greek believed a complete expression of his hatred was serious and necessary; in these moments the compressed and swollen sentiment relieved itself: the tiger leapt forth, a voluptuous cruelty shone from his terrible eye. Why must the Greek sculptor give form again and again to war and fighting in innumerable repetitions — outstretched human bodies whose sinews are strained from hatred or from the arrogance of triumph, people wounded and doubled over, dying persons gasping their last breaths? Why did the entire Greek world rejoice in the fighting scenes of the *Iliad*? I fear that we do not understand them in a way that is sufficiently "Greek"; indeed, that we would shudder if, for once, we understood them "in Greek."

<sup>1</sup>I am indebted to numerous friends, colleagues, and teachers whose comments, criticism, and encouragement made this translation better than it would otherwise have been. Among them are Richard Patterson, Rudolf Lüthe, Steven Strange, Nickolas Pappas, Ralph Acampora, and especially, the very patient Donald Rutherford.

<sup>2</sup>Page numbers for the German text in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1967ff), III, 2) are provided in brackets.

<sup>3</sup>This incident is not documented in the *Anabasis* of Arrian, an extensive account of the life of Alexander, but two other historians provide some details: Quintus Curtius 4.6.25-29 and Hegesias of Magnesia in Jacoby, *Die Fragmente der Grieschen Historiker* (Berlin, 1923-) 142, Fragment 5.

<sup>4</sup>In the *Iliad*, Achilles avenges the murder of Patroclus by killing Hector (son of Priam, King of Troy), mutilating the body, and dragging it behind his chariot. Priam pays the ransom to have Hector's body returned, and his funeral ends the *Iliad*.

<sup>5</sup>Alexander the Great is reputed to have treasured his copy of the *Iliad*, which he placed in a jeweled casket. His favorite hero was Achilles, and he danced naked around the legendary hero's tomb when he passed through Troy.

<sup>6</sup>In the first half of the 7th century B.C.E., Corcyra (modern Corfu), rebelled against Corinth, which had colonized the island in 734. Corcyra defeated Corinth in what is believed to be the first naval battle between two Greek states (Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* 1.13.4). The animosity continued throughout the following generations and included acts of retaliation and resistance. Their struggle was played out in events that precipitated the Peloponnesian War (Thucydides 3.82-3.84). Eventually Corcyra was destroyed by a revolution that Corinth helped to incite.

But what lies *behind* the Homeric world as the womb of all things Hellenic? By means of extraordinary artistic certainty and the tranquillity and purity of the lines, we are already raised above mere material fusion in the *Homeric world*: its colors appear lighter, milder, warmer through an artistic deception; in this colorful, warm illumination, its people appear better and more likable — but where do we look when we are no longer led and protected by the hand of Homer, [279] striding back into the pre-Homeric world? Only into night and horror, into the products of an imagination accustomed to the horrible. What kind of earthly existence is reflected in these repulsively terrible theogonic myths: a life over which alone the *children of Night* rule, Strife, Lustful Greed, Deception, Old Age, and Death.<sup>7</sup> Let us think of the air of Hesiod's poem; it is already difficult to breathe. Then imagine it still thicker and darker and without all the alleviations and purifications that poured out over Hellas from Delphi and the numerous seats of the gods: let us mix this thick Boeotian air with the dark voluptuousness of the Etruscan;<sup>8</sup> then such a reality would *extort* from us a world of myths in which Uranos, Kronos, and Zeus and the fighting Titans<sup>9</sup> must appear as a relief; in this brooding atmosphere, fighting is salvation, escape, the cruelty of victory is the height of life's jubilation. And in truth, just as the concept of Greek law developed from *murder* and the expiation of murder, so too, the nobler culture also takes its first victory wreath from the altar of the expiation of murder. Following that bloody age a furrowing wave cuts deeply into Hellenic history. The names of Orpheus, Musaeus, and their cults<sup>10</sup> betray the conclusions that necessarily follow from the uninterrupted view of a world of fighting and cruelty — toward a disgust with existence, toward the interpretation of this existence as punishment and atonement, toward belief in the identity of existence and indebtedness. Yet these conclusions are not specifically Hellenic: in these, Greece is similar to India and the Orient in general. The Hellenic genius had yet another answer ready to the question: "What does a life of fighting and victory want?" and gives this answer through the entire breadth of Greek history.

In order to understand the answer, we must first assume that the Greek genius once found value in the existence of such a terrible drive [280] and thought it *justified*, while in Orphic thought lay the belief that a life with such a drive as its root is not worth living. Fighting and the

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<sup>7</sup>See Hesiod's *Theogony*, 211 - 231. Among Night's other children are Doom, Deceit and Love, Sleep, Blame, Sad Distress, and Nemesis. Mügge's translation fails to communicate the connection between the passage in Hesiod and what follows. He and Carol Diethe translate "Kinder der Nacht" as "children of the night." Kaufmann translates the passage "children of Night," but he fails to render it with the emphasis given by Nietzsche. Because Hesiod is recounting a genealogy of the gods, the preceding words should be translated as proper names; Kaufmann does not do so.

<sup>8</sup>The Etruscans occupied central Italy and are believed to be the earliest historical people to inhabit the area. At the height of the Etruscan empire (620-500 B.C.E.) their domain stretched from Po, in the north, to the Campania region of the south, including early Rome. The Etruscans decorated tombs of the dead with carvings and paintings in an orientalizing style. Paintings depicted the stark figures of the Underworld alongside scenes of banqueting, dancing, and racing.

<sup>9</sup>According to Greek mythology, the Titans, the twelve children of heaven and earth, were the divine ancestors of the Olympians. Some of the offspring of the original twelve were also considered Titans, most notably Prometheus and Atlas. Rhea, a Titan, mother of Zeus, joined her son in compelling Cronus to expel his other children. A ten year battle ensued between the Titans and Zeus, who was joined by his brothers and sisters. Zeus emerged victorious. According to some accounts he eventually freed the Titans.

<sup>10</sup>Orpheus was given a lyre by Apollo, and the Muses provided his instruction. He was known as the initiator of the Mysteries of Dionysus. When his wife Eurydice died, he used his extraordinary talent to charm the guardians of the Underworld. The gods agreed to release her on the condition that Orpheus not look back at her as they climbed the path back to earth. At the end of the path, before Eurydice moved into the sunlight, Orpheus eagerly looked back at her and she disappeared forever. In sorrow, Orpheus retreated to a life of solitude. He was later murdered by group of mad women. See Plato, *Symposium* 179d; Virgil, *Georgics* 4.454-527 and *Culex* 267-297; and Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 10.3ff, 10.72ff, and 11.1ff. Musaeus was a legendary poet, believed to be either the pupil or the son of Orpheus. He was buried in Athens in a tomb next to the Acropolis. Members of the cults allegedly believed that, as punishment for sin, the soul is imprisoned in the body. See Socrates' remarks in Plato, *Cratylus* 400c.

lust for victory were acknowledged: and nothing separates the Greek world from ours as much as the *coloring*, derived hence, of individual ethical concepts, for example *eris* and *envy*.<sup>11</sup>

When the traveler Pausanius<sup>12</sup> visited the Helicon on his travels through Greece, he was shown an ancient copy of the first didactic poem of the Greeks, Hesiod's "Works and Days," which was inscribed on leaden plates and severely damaged by time and weather.<sup>13</sup> Yet he made out this much, that, unlike the usual copies, it had at its top not the little Hymn to Zeus, but rather it began right away with the statement, "two Eris goddesses are on earth." This is one of the most remarkable<sup>14</sup> Hellenic thoughts and worth inscribing for all who come before the entrance gate to Greek ethics. "One would praise one Eris as much as one would find fault with the other if one had any sense, for these two goddesses have completely separate dispositions. One encourages bad war and strife — cruelty! No mortal likes her, but, under the yoke of necessity, one shows this Eris, who is difficult to bear, honor according to the decree of the immortals. This one behaved as the older, Black Night, but high-ruling Zeus placed the other in the roots of the earth and among mankind as one much better.<sup>15</sup> She drives even the unskilled man to work; and if someone who lacks possessions looks upon another who is rich, the first will hurry himself to sow and to plant in the same way as the other and to order his house well. Neighbor competes with neighbor, striving for wealth. This Eris is good for humankind. Even the potter resents the potter and the carpenter resents the carpenter; beggar envies beggar and singer envies singer."<sup>16</sup> [281] According to our scholars, the appearance of the last two verses about the *odium figulinum*<sup>17</sup> in this position is incomprehensible. In their judgment, the predicates "resentment" and "envy" are proper only to the nature of the bad Eris; wherefore they do not hesitate to regard the verses as spurious or as cast by accident in this place. Concerning this, however, an ethic other than the Hellenic must have inspired our scholars without their knowledge since Aristotle takes no offense with respect to the verses about the good Eris.<sup>18</sup> And<sup>19</sup> not only Aristotle but all of Greek antiquity thinks differently from us about resentment and envy and judges with Hesiod, who both designates one Eris as evil, namely, the one who leads human beings to hostile fights of annihilation against one another, and then praises as good another Eris, who as jealousy, resentment, and envy provokes human beings to action — not to the action of fights of annihilation but rather to the action of contests. The Greek is *envious* and does not find this quality to be a

<sup>11</sup>Kaufmann omits most of the next 36 lines of the German text.

<sup>12</sup>A Lydian and the author of Travels in Greece. Pausanias lived in the 2nd century A.D. and was known to have traveled widely throughout Greece, Macedonia, Asia, Palestine, and Egypt. He finally settled in Rome where he wrote his description of Greece.

<sup>13</sup>Works and Days portrays Hesiod speaking to his brother and extolling the virtues of country living. Hesiod is alleged to have participated in the funeral games of Amphidamas (given by his son Ganyctor), where he won first prize in a contest with Homer. See the Contest Between Homer and Hesiod (author unknown) and Nietzsche's "Der Florentinische Tractat über Homer und Hesiod, ihr Geschlecht und ihren Wettkampf," KGW II, 1, 271-338, for more details. Also see Pausanias 9.31.4.

<sup>14</sup>"...der merkwürdigsten hellenischen Gedanken..." The word "merkwürdig" also means "alien" or "unusual". These alternative translations are also appropriate here since Nietzsche is claiming that his contemporaries do not truly understand Greek culture, that the Greeks are more different from us than we realize.

<sup>15</sup>In the myth in the Works and Days (121ff), Hesiod describes five races that the gods have created. The last, the race of iron, lives on the earth and is required to work upon it. Presumably, the good Eris is placed "in the roots of the earth" in order to make labor bearable. Socrates refers to this genealogy in Plato's Cratylus 394d and 397e-398c. Compare with the myth of metals in Plato, Republic 415a ff, 468c, 547a.

<sup>16</sup>Socrates cites this last phrase in Plato's Lysis 215d.

<sup>17</sup>Literally "hatred of the potter," a reference to the proverb taken from Hesiod's Works and Days.

<sup>18</sup>See Aristotle's Rhetoric 1388a16 and 1381b16-17 and Nicomachean Ethics 1155a35-b1.

<sup>19</sup>Kaufmann's translation resumes with this sentence.

blemish but the effect of a *beneficent* deity: what a chasm of ethical judgment lies between us and him!<sup>20</sup> Because he is envious, he also feels, at every excess of glory, riches, splendor, and luck, the envious eyes of a god resting on him, and he fears this envy; in these cases the god reminds him that every lot of man is transitory, makes him shudder before his fortune, and, sacrificing the best of it, he humbles himself before the godly envy. This idea does not alienate him from his gods, whose meaning, on the contrary, is thereby circumscribed: that he, whose soul is jealously enflamed by every other living being, must *never* dare to fight in contest with the gods. In the fights of Thamyris with the Muses,<sup>21</sup> of Marsyas with Apollo,<sup>22</sup> in the moving fate of Niobe<sup>23</sup> appears the horrible opposition of two powers who must never fight with each other, human and god.

However, the greater and more sublime a Greek is, the brighter the ambitious flame breaks out of him, [282] consuming everyone who runs with him on the same path. Aristotle once made a list of such hostile contestants in the great styles:<sup>24</sup> among them is the most striking example — that even a dead man can still excite a living one to burning jealousy. Thus Aristotle designated the relation of Xenophanes of Colophon to Homer.<sup>25</sup> We do not understand the strength of Xenophanes', and later Plato's, attack on the national hero of poetry, if we do not also think of the monstrous desire at the root of these attacks to assume the place of the overthrown poet and inherit his fame. Every great Hellene passes on the torch of the contest; every great virtue sets afire new greatness. When the young Themistocles<sup>26</sup> could not sleep for thought of the laurels of Miltiades,<sup>27</sup> his instinct, aroused early and unleashed only in his long rivalry with Aristides,<sup>28</sup>

<sup>20</sup>Kaufmann omits the next three sentences.

<sup>21</sup>Thamyris was a legendary poet and musician from Thrace. He lost his talented voice when the Muses punished him for boasting that he could beat them in a singing contest. See Pausanias 4.33.7.

<sup>22</sup>According to Greek mythology, Marsyas lost a musical contest with Apollo after he was caught bragging that he could bring about the god's defeat by playing a flute he had found. Marsyas had not realized that the flute was one Athena had discarded. She placed a curse upon it before tossing it by a stream. After Apollo won the contest, he flayed Marsyas alive for his *hybris*. See Pausanias 10.30.9 and Apollodorus 1.4.2. In Plato's *Symposium*, Alcibiades compares the words of Socrates to the music of Marsyas (216a).

<sup>23</sup>In Greek mythology, Niobe is caught boasting about her fertility, contrasting the number of children she has borne with the number of children borne by Leto, Zeus' first wife. Niobe also boasts about her own beauty, her divine heritage, and the power of her husband. Leto's children, Apollo and Artemis, avenged their mother by killing all of Niobe's children. Later, Zeus changed her into a marble statue. See Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 6.165ff and 6.305ff.

<sup>24</sup>In his catalogue of Aristotle's writings, Diogenes Laertius mentions lists of victors in festival games. See Diogenes Laertius 5.25-26.

<sup>25</sup>Greek philosopher and rhapsode who lived c. 570 - 480 B.C.E. Xenophanes was allegedly the pupil of Anaximander. He was highly critical of the Greek educational system, especially the honor traditionally given to Hesiod and Homer. Xenophanes also disproved of the great esteem given to athletes and athletic competitions. His jealousy of Homer is described in Jonathan Barnes, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, Fragment 75.

<sup>26</sup>Athenian statesman and commander who lived c. 528 - 462 B.C.E. After his successful campaign against the Persians in the battle of Salamis, Themistocles became the object of great jealousy in Athens. He was ostracized in 471. Thucydides claims that Themistocles was one of "the most distinguished of the Hellenes." See Thucydides 1.138.

<sup>27</sup>Athenian general who lived c. 550-489 B.C.E. Miltiades was credited with the victory over the Persians at the decisive battle of Marathon. After this victory, he was given command of 70 Athenian ships, which he used to attack the island of Paros. The Parians resisted. Desperate, Miltiades sought the advice of the priestess Timo, who instructed him to enter the temple of Demeter. He was injured as he jumped over the wall surrounding the temple and later died of his wounds. See Herodotus 6.133-137.

<sup>28</sup>Athenian statesman and general who lived c. 530 - 468 B.C.E. Aristides was the long-standing political opponent of Themistocles. He served Athens as the public treasurer for some time and exposed what he believed to be the abuse of public funds by Themistocles. He served Athens well in the battle at Marathon. After his return, he worked as a mediator and earned the name "Aristides the Just." This caused him to be envied by many. Themistocles waged a successful campaign to

became the extraordinary, purely instinctive genius of his political activity, which Thucydides<sup>29</sup> describes to us. How characteristic are the question and the answer when a distinguished opponent of Pericles is asked whether he or Pericles is the best wrestler in the city, and the answer is given: "Even when I take him down, he denies that he has fallen, achieves his goal, and persuades those who have seen him fall."<sup>30</sup>

If one wants to see that feeling, fully revealed, in its naive expressions, the feeling of necessity of contest for the preservation of the state, then one should reflect on the original meaning of *ostracism*: as, for example, the Ephesians express it in their banishment of Hermodorus: "Among us no one should be the best; but if anyone is, then let him be elsewhere and among others."<sup>31</sup> Why should no one be the best? Because with that the contest would dry up and the perpetual source of life of the Hellenic state would be endangered.<sup>32</sup> Later ostracism acquires another role in relation to the contest: it was applied when the danger became obvious that one of the great competing [283] politicians and party leaders felt himself moved, in the heat of competition, to harmful and destructive means and to questionable revolutionary acts. The original function of this strange institution is not, however, as a safety valve but rather as a means of stimulation: one removes individuals who tower over the others only to reawaken the play of powers — a thought that is hostile to the "exclusivity" of genius in the modern sense, but which presupposes that in a natural order of things, there are always *several* geniuses, who incite each other to reciprocal action as they keep each other within the limits of measure. That is the crux of the Hellenic idea of contest: it detests autocracy and fears its dangers, it craves as protection against the genius — a second genius.

Every talent must express itself in fighting thus commands the Hellenic popular pedagogy, whereas modern educators fear nothing more than the unleashing of so-called ambition.<sup>33</sup> Today one fears selfishness as "evil in itself" — with the exception of the Jesuits, who share the disposition of the ancients, and therefore are, perhaps, the most effective educators of our time. They appear to believe that selfishness, that is, the distinguishing characteristic, is only the most powerful *agens*, its character develops essentially as 'good' and 'evil' from the goals toward which it strives. Yet for the ancients, the goal of agonistic education was the welfare of the whole, of civic society. Every Athenian, for example, was supposed to develop himself in contests in order to be of the highest service to Athens and bring it the least harm. There was no ambition toward the unmeasured and immeasurable as modern ambition generally is: the youth thought of the well-being of his native city when he sang or threw or ran in contests; he wished to increase the city's

have him ostracized in 483, but he was recalled in 480. He continued to have a successful career as a military leader and negotiator with other Greek states.

<sup>29</sup>Greek historian who lived c. 460 - 401 B.C.E. Thucydides spent much of his early adulthood as an Athenian general. After suffering defeat, he went into exile for 20 years. He is the author of History of the Peloponnesian War.

<sup>30</sup>Athenian statesman, general, and orator who lived c. 495 - 429 B.C.E. This anecdote is recalled in Plutarch, Lives 5.8.4. Pericles was well-educated and is believed to have been a pupil of Anaxagoras. He was a remarkable public speaker and earned the favor of the people. After the Persian War, he called for the rebuilding of destroyed temples and used money from the Delian League to rebuild Athens. He led the Athenians in resisting the Spartans in the Peloponnesian War. Pericles was blamed by his enemies for the plague that broke out in 430, and he suffered several failures in the war. He was forced to resign his position and was fined. Although he was later recalled, he, too, perished of the plague.

<sup>31</sup>Diogenes Laertius (9.1) recounts this order. Also see Heraclitus, Fragment 121. Hermodorus was supposedly a friend of Heraclitus.

<sup>32</sup>Kaufmann omits the next sentence.

<sup>33</sup>Kaufmann omits the next 25 lines of the German text.

share of glory by increasing his own glory; to his city's gods he dedicated the wreaths<sup>34</sup> that the judges placed upon his head in honor. Every Greek felt in himself, from childhood on, [284] the burning wish to be an instrument of the well-being of his city in the contest of the cities: with this his selfishness was enflamed, with this it was bridled and restrained. Thus, individuals were freer in antiquity because their goals were nearer and more tangible. Modern man, however, is above all marked by infinity just like the quick-footed Achilles in the parables of the Eleatic Zeno<sup>35</sup>: infinity inhibits him, he does not even once overtake the tortoise.<sup>36</sup>

And<sup>37</sup> just as the youths to be educated were brought up competing with one another, so too, their educators rivaled with each other. Suspicious and jealous, the great musical masters, Pindar<sup>38</sup> and Simonides,<sup>39</sup> stood next to each other; rivalrous, the sophist, the higher teacher of antiquity, met other sophists; even the most general art of instruction, through drama, was given to the people only in the form of a marvelous wrestling of great musical and dramatic artists. How wonderful! "Even the artist resents the artist!" But modern man fears nothing more in an artist than the personal struggling impulse, whereas the Greeks know the artist *only in personal conflict*. There, where modern man senses the weakness of the work of art, the Hellene looks for the source of its highest power! What, for example, in Plato is of special artistic significance in his dialogues is mainly the result of a rivalry with the art of the orators, sophists, and dramatists of his time, invented for the purpose of enabling him to say at last: "Look, I too can do what my great rivals can; indeed, I can do it better than they. No Protagoras<sup>40</sup> has written myths so beautiful as I, no dramatists created such an animated and fascinating whole as the Symposium, no orator has composed such a speech as I put down in the Gorgias — and now I reject it altogether and condemn all imitative art! Only the contest made me into a poet, into a sophist, into an orator!" What [285] a problem opens up before us, then, when we ask about the relation of the contest to the conception of the work of art! —<sup>41</sup>

Once we remove the contest from Greek life, we see at once, in that pre-Homeric abyss, a horrible ferocity of hate and desire to annihilate. This phenomenon unfortunately appears quite frequently when a great personality, through a tremendously splendid deed, is suddenly removed

<sup>34</sup>Wreaths were often the victory prizes in athletic contests. The sacred games — Olympian, Pythian, Nemean, and Isthmian — were held in honor of the gods. These games originally awarded only wreaths to the victors. A great deal of research has been devoted to the kinds of prizes given, especially as they reflect attitudes about the purpose of the games and athletic skill. For a helpful review of this literature, see H. W. Pleket, "Games, Prizes, Athletes and Ideology: Some Aspects of the History of Sport in the Greco-Roman World," Stadion 1 (1975) 49 - 89.

<sup>35</sup>Greek philosopher from the 5th century B.C.E. Zeno is known for his paradoxes and theory of infinity.

<sup>36</sup>One of Zeno's paradoxes. As part of his discussion of infinity, Zeno offers the following example: if Achilles were to race a turtle, the turtle, bound by time, would win if he were given a short head start. Every time Achilles reached the place where the turtle had been, the turtle would have moved further along, etc.

<sup>37</sup>Kaufmann's translation resumes with this sentence.

<sup>38</sup>Poet who lived c. 518 - 438 B.C.E. He is primarily known for his odes to victors in the sacred games. Family members or leaders of the victor's native city would hire Pindar to compose the victory ode, and he would often travel to read the ode in public at a festival celebrating the athlete. He wrote numerous odes for the Sicilian tyrants, including Hieron I of Syracuse.

<sup>39</sup>A lyric and elegiac poet who lived 556 - 468 B.C.E. Simonides was famous for his sepulchral epigrams. His epitaph for those who died at Marathon was preferred to the one written by Aeschylus even though the latter had fought in the battle. He was popular among the Sicilian tyrants and spent the last seven years of his life at the court of Hieron.

<sup>40</sup>Greek Sophist who lived c. 485 - 411 B.C.E. Although he was an itinerant educator, Protagoras spent most of his time in Athens and was a friend of Pericles and of the tragic poet Euripides. He was charged with impiety after writing a treatise entitled "On the Gods," in which he argued that the gods were unknowable. As he fled to Sicily, he was lost at sea.

<sup>41</sup>Compare Longinus, On the Sublime 13.3-5.

from the contest and becomes *hors de concours* in his own judgment and in that of his fellow citizens. The result is, almost without exception, a frightful one; and if one usually draws from this the conclusion that the Greek was unable to bear his fame and fortune, then one should say more precisely that he was unable to endure fame without further contest, unable to endure fortune at the end of the contest. There is no clearer example of this than the final fate of Miltiades. Placed upon a solitary peak and raised far above every fellow fighter by his incomparable success at Marathon, he feels awakening in himself a base desire for revenge against a Parian citizen, with whom he had an enmity long ago. To satisfy this desire, he abuses his reputation, city property, and civic honor and dishonors himself.<sup>42</sup> Sensing his failure, he descends into unworthy machinations. He forms a secret and godless liaison with the priestess of Demeter, Timo; and, at night, he steps into the holy temple from which every man was excluded. Once he has jumped over the wall and comes nearer to the holy place of the goddess, he is suddenly overcome by the terrible horror of a panic of fear; almost collapsing and without consciousness, he feels himself driven back, and as he is jumping back over the wall, he crashes down paralyzed and severely injured. The siege must be lifted, the court awaits him,<sup>43</sup> and a dishonorable death stamps its seal on a brilliant heroic career, darkening it for all posterity. After the battle at Marathon, envy of the heavenly [286] seized him. And this godly envy is inflamed when it spots a human being without a rival, unopposed, on a solitary peak of fame. Now he has only the gods next to him — and therefore he has them against him. They seduce him to an act of *hybris*, and under it he collapses.

Let us note well that just as Miltiades perishes, so the noblest Greek city-states perish when, through merit and fortune, they arrive at the temple of Nike from the race track.<sup>44</sup> Athens, which had destroyed the independence of its allies and punished with strength the uprisings of its subjects, and Sparta, which after the battle of Aegospotamoi<sup>45</sup> proved its dominance in an even more severe and cruel way, like Miltiades, brought about their decline through acts of *hybris*, offering evidence for the claim that without envy, jealousy, and contesting ambition, the Hellenic state, like the Hellenic human being, degenerates. It becomes evil and cruel; it becomes revengeful and godless; in short, it becomes "pre-Homeric" —<sup>46</sup> and then it requires only a panic of fear to

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<sup>42</sup>Kaufmann omits the next 11 lines of the German text.

<sup>43</sup>Kaufmann's translation resumes here.

<sup>44</sup>Nike was the goddess of victory. She became especially popular after the Persian War. The Athenians dedicated a statue to her at Delphi after the victory at Salamis (480 B.C.E.).

<sup>45</sup>A small river and town in ancient Thrace, known as the Chersonese (now the Peninsula of Gallipoli in Turkey). There the Spartan commander Lysander led a victorious battle over the Athenians in 405 B.C.E. near the end of the Peloponnesian War. The Athenians declared the victory unfair because they had been betrayed by commanders believed to have taken bribes from Lysander. These events were thought to have fulfilled two oracles, one of which describes the destruction of the Athenian fleet as an act of Zeus, thus supporting the belief that the gods were retaliating for the *hybris* demonstrated by Athens in her fiscal subjugation of her former allies in the Delian League. Additionally, these events were interpreted as divine revenge against the Athenians for the brutal acts they committed at this same site during the Persian War. Near the war's end the Greeks and Spartans went to take the victory prize: the bridge at Hellespont (see The New Century Classical Handbook, ed. Catherine B. Avery (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1962) p. 29). When they arrived they found the bridge already destroyed. The Spartans left for home, but Xanthippos, the Athenian leader insisted on staying to annihilate the Persians. When the Athenians landed at Sestos the Persians rallied around Artaktes, the region's governor. They attempted to break the blockade. Artaktes and his men made it to nearby Aegospotamoi and were captured and returned to Sestos. Herodotus testifies that Artaktes twice made offers of bribes to spare his life and that of his son. Xanthippos refused: Artaktes' son was stoned to death before his eyes, and he met his own death nailed to a board. See Herodotus 9.120.

<sup>46</sup>Kaufmann's translation ends here.

bring its defeat and crush it. Sparta and Athens surrender to Persia, as Themistocles and Alcibiades did;<sup>47</sup> they betray the Hellenic once they have given up the contest, the noblest fundamental thought of the Hellenes: and Alexander, the roughened copy and abbreviation of Greek history, now invents over civilized Hellenes and so-called "Hellenism". —

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<sup>47</sup>Themistocles might be thought to have betrayed the Hellenes on several occasions. During the Persian War, he is believed to have taken a bribe from the Euboeans at Artemisium. Although Themistocles continued to gain great fame in subsequent battles, rumors of the bribe later surfaced, and in 471 he was ostracized from Athens. He was also charged with aiding Pausanias, who was accused of attempting to rule Greece with Persian aid. Themistocles lived in exile for some time and eventually traveled to Persia where he spent the remainder of his life in the service of the Persian court. Alcibiades was an Athenian general who lived c. 450 - 404 B.C.E. He was well known for his handsome appearance, competitive drive, and political ambition (see Plutarch, *Lives* 6.2.1-3). His friendship with Socrates failed to contribute to his moral virtue. In 421 B.C.E., he conspired with Sparta to break the peace agreement with Athens that Nicias, his political opponent, had negotiated. Several years later he was removed from his position as general and was replaced by Nicias when the Spartans defeated the Athenians at Mantinea. But Alcibiades regained public approval and was successful in convincing the Athenians to aid the Sicilians against Selinus in 416 B.C.E. Just prior to the expedition, the Hermae statues were mutilated, and Alcibiades was accused as the perpetrator of this and other acts of impiety. As soon as he arrived in Sicily, he was recalled to Athens for his trial. Alcibiades escaped when the ship sent to retrieve him docked at Thurii. He was tried and convicted *in absentia*. Alcibiades retaliated by betraying Athens to Sparta and convincing the latter to renew war efforts against his homeland. He later made his way to Ionia to convince the Ionians to revolt against Athens and then went to Persia to persuade Tissaphernes to promote war between Athens and Sparta in order to weaken them both. Alcibiades returned home four years later in 408 after achieving enormous military victories for Athens, but he soon fell out of favor again. He was slain in Persia while attempting to peddle his services to King Artaxerxes. See references to Alcibiades in Thucydides 6.15-16.

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